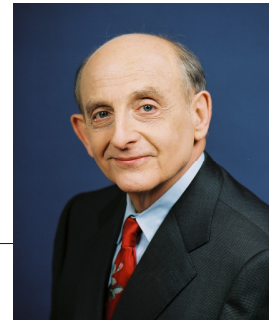


COACHES IN THE GAME OF LIFE—DR FRED GROSSE

BY ADELE FERGUSON FOR THE BUSINESS REVIEW WEEKLY



Elite athletes rely on their personal coaches to ensure they stay on top of their game. The coaches monitor training sessions and help their charges fine-tune technique to ensure no flaws creep in. They have become an accepted part of sport, a performance enhancement no athlete would dare go without.

So wouldn't it make life much easier for executives if they could get similar one-on-one coaching in their lives and careers?

In America (naturally) that is just what is happening. The gentler, kinder nineties have spawned the so-called life trainer, the consultant who can advise on all aspects of life and how it may be affecting career success. This can be as basic as a personal grooming, to issues as complex - Machiavellian, perhaps - as designing a plan to leapfrog colleagues on the career ladder. The aim is to help clients get their professional, personal and financial lives in order.

Life trainers, who promote themselves as "facilitators of dynamic personal change", advise on all aspects of a client's life: including work, home, physical fitness and financial status.

Like so many American trends, the life trainer has now taken root in Australia. The unambiguously-named Synthesis Elite Coaching has been founded by Paul Kelly and Elizabeth Whitelock. Kelly is one of the country's best-known speaking and presentation coaches, whose clients have included Australian Consolidated Press, Westpac, the Australian cricket team, Deutsche Morgan Grenfell and McDonald's. Whitelock is a former team leader in banking and finance with business communication consultancy Rogen. She has worked in development teams, support teams and projects focused on enhancing system performance.

So what exactly does a life trainer do? Kelly says he works with individuals on two fronts. "We work with the individual up front to help them evaluate their own performance, using a range of tools such as health analysis, personal values, a personality test and a self-evaluation," he says. "That is the starting point. Then we draw it out and say: Where does it leave you? What do you want to be? What are your aspirations?" From there, Kelly says he helps the individual build goals and develop a personal strategy. "We give clients a range of headings to work on. We look at barriers and opportunities, relationships, health and spiritual needs."

Fred Grosse, of the Institute for Management, Organisation and Motivation, is also one of the leading lights of an emerging profession, although he prefers to describe himself as a business psychotherapist, mentor and trainer rather than a "life trainer". Grosse is trained as an organisational and management psychologist, and a Gestalt therapist (Gestalt is a school of psychology that encourages people to release their emotions).

Grosse says the sporting coach is an apt metaphor for what the life trainer does. "For some reason the sport people have initiated the idea that nobody can get to the Olympics without a coach," he says. "This is because coaching takes it to the next level. So why can't business people have a coach?"

Grosse believes business people need life trainers to help advance their careers. He says people are conditioned to accept limitations on their ambitions rather than aiming for the very top. Education systems around the world fail to train people to succeed and become super achievers, he says. "It isn't just Australians that suffer from the small-poppy belief. It is all around the world. I teach them to become tall poppies. There are few programs for super achievers and so part of my job is to train them to fulfil their potential."

Grosse promises big results for his clients. His program has three goals: doubling net income in 12 to 18 months; building a "magnificent" life; and know that you know. The first goal is objective, the second subjective, and the third, well, ambiguous. "Knowing that you know means individuals understand why they have achieved rather than regarding success as a fluke that cannot be duplicated in the future," he explains.

Life coaching has become a multi-million-dollar industry in the US but is still small beer here. Kelly believes the time is right for a take-off. "There is a growing need for managers to balance their personal and professional life, so why not have a life coach?"

Life trainers don't come cheap. In 1998 most charged about \$500 an hour for a personal consultation, although 15-minute telephone "top-ups" are available for \$125. Synthesis Elite Coaching offers a one-year program priced at \$15,000, which includes a one-day one-on-one session to design a life plan and work out areas of weakness. This is followed up each month with a two-hour session to make sure the individual is on track - and regular telephone contact

Grosse offers an eight-day program, spread out over a year, for \$5,250 incl GST. He also offers four-day programs and private coaching.

Any of these prices look cheap when compared to the prices commanded by some of the US gurus. Back in 1998 American management trainer and motivator Anthony "Awaken The Giant Within" Robbins provides one-on-one consulting for US\$125000 a day. Robbins also offers a 10-day course called "Life Mastery" for US\$8500. The course takes place in Hawaii each year and covers health, finances, leadership and relationships.

The US-born Grosse is based in New Zealand but spends much of his time in Australia and the US with his clients. He does not claim to be an expert in all aspects of every person's life. "If someone needs a new wardrobe to project the right corporate image, I wouldn't take them shopping," he says. "But I know somebody who will. If someone has low self-esteem, I'll encourage them to go to acting classes or public-speaking classes." Grosse says he has worked with some of the top names in the big end of town.

Apparently, those who believe life comes naturally have been wrong. It is something that needs to be taught, at least if it is to be lived successfully. While some of what the life trainers talk about may seem little more than common sense, there are plenty of customers who will pay to listen.